

"Spreading the Word"

As mentioned in a previous column - pride is contagious! The problem is that it is often lies dormant and needs a spark or catalyst to wake it up. We do not need a national tragedy, we simply need the act of one individual in cleaning up their property to infect a neighbor or the inspiration of a small committee in one community to help an older citizen fix up their home that gets repeated by neighboring communities. The need is to "spread the word". Building on the good news stories and making sure that others hear about them is what we need. This column is designed to spread the word about the good new stories. The following is one of those great stories.

A small clean and attractive town in southern Iowa with a population of about 600 has a "community eyesore" that has been bothering neighbors and the community in general. One part of a city block in the heart of the town contained a vacant home in disrepair, two abandoned cars and a lot filled with weeds. Adjacent to the lot was a home that appears to be vacant or abandoned. It is run-down, the lot is filled with debris. In addition, the rumor is that the person living in the home has a "hog" as a companion.

The dilemma for this small town is how to deal with the two issues. To shorten the story, the property owner that is reported to have the hog in his home was taken to court and a fine levied against him. To date however, no follow-up action has been taken to collect the fine nor has there been any additional legal action.

The adjacent owner of the vacant house has been contacted, he lives out of state and is willing to sell at a reasonable rate except that the community does not have the dollars. Each situation is unique and each requires special attention and a heavy financial commitment.

One of the local residents contacted Keep Iowa Beautiful for assistance. I stopped in and visited to learn more and to inspect the properties. Following the visit, the town development committee became involved. They established a plan of attack and have now established a "Keep the Local Community Beautiful" affiliate.

In a subsequent visit and discussion the following plan of action has been initiated - the local committee developed a strategy of contacting the County Attorney to follow up on the action against the property owner that had been fined and by contacting the former resident of the community that has offered to donate the dollars required to buy the vacant property. The committee has agreed to serve as the agent for the acquisition. In this manner it can be acquired, cleaned up and resold to be placed back on the tax roles at a higher value and greater return to the community.

In both cases - positive action is underway. If they are successful the improvements to the community will be significant.

In addition, the committee has developed a two year plan of action. It focuses on those efforts outlined above and other items that the group can undertake to improve the image

of their community. One of those is the painting of a home for an elderly individual. They are also looking at entryway improvements and other selected cleanup projects. This is a great story of community pride focusing on positive and active citizen involvement. It is a story that needs to be told. The story even gets better with time! At a recently sponsored committee bake sale over \$500 was raised for beautification efforts in the community. It is contagious - spread the word and let pride infect others.

To obtain additional information on the organization please contact:

Gerald F. Schnepf, Executive Director
Keep Iowa Beautiful
300 East Locust - Suite 100
Des Moines, IA 50309
Phone: 515-323-6507
E-mail: gschnepf@keepiowabeautiful.com
Web Page: www.keepiowabeautiful.com

See you in the next column featuring the "Measuring Success".

Helping to Keep Iowa Beautiful

Gerald F. Schnepf, Executive Director